

Good Afternoon. I first would like to thank Chairman Kuipers and the rest of the committee for the opportunity to testify on Senate Bill 842. This bill presents the education community with a chance to have a productive and careful discussion on student achievement.

My name is Peter Spadafore; I am the Associate Director of the Michigan Elementary and Middle School Principals Association. One of the great pleasures of my job is the opportunity to work with so many talented and devoted educators in the state of Michigan. On a daily basis I have the chance to interact with principals serving Michigan students in diverse geographic and socioeconomic regions in our great state.

The elementary and middle school principals have made it clear, decisions on the academic progress of at-risk students should be left to the education experts on the front lines who are trained in making these very difficult and individual decisions; our counselors, teachers, principals, and parents work case by case to ensure that the best solution for each child is achieved. A state policy that insists all situations are similar and that a similar solution should be applied universally is simply bad policy and bad for the children who most need the guidance of those experts.

The philosophical arguments aside, I would like to share with you some data that speaks to the adverse effects of retention. Retention policies based on testing have been tried in states like Florida, Georgia, and Texas and have proved to be ineffective and perhaps detrimental for a large number of children involved. Perhaps the most well known example is in the city of Chicago where the Board of Education implemented a mandatory retention policy for students who scored at least one grade level below expectation for the third grade.

The results of this case were gloomy, at best. Retention rates were as high as 20% for third graders after the implementation of the policy. On average, 18% of third graders retained in the 1997, 1998, and 1999 school years were placed in special education within two years of the decision for retention – this is an increase of three times that of low-

achieving students prior to the introduction of this policy. The same trends were seen in the State of Florida following the implementation of a mandatory retention policy. In the first year of the policy Florida third grade retention rates jumped more than four times the pre-policy rate.

Research has shown that there is little evidence that students who were retained did any better than low-achieving students who were promoted onto the fourth grade. Over time, Chicago Public Schools have seen that fewer than 60% of the students who were retained in third grade were able to raise their test score to the promotional cutoff. Simply learning the same material again, did very little to improve the performance level of students retained.

If we focus solely on social promotion or retention as the solution to below average reading performance, we stand a strong chance of losing students to higher rates of school failure and/or dropout. We at MEMSPA appreciate the ongoing dialogue concerning low-achieving students and would be pleased to work with Chairman Kuipers and the entire Education Committee to come up with a different and more effective solution that works for the at-risk children in our state. Let us learn from the policies that don't work in other states and come up with a solution that does work for Michigan children.

Thank you for your time today.